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ARTICLES:

(1) Agricultural Minister Ota quits, taking responsibility for the tainted rice issue, with only five days left for the Fukuda Cabinet

MAINICHI (Top play) (Excerpt)
Eve., September 19, 2008

Minister of Agriculture Seiichi Ota has firmed up his intention to resign his post, taking responsibility for the ministry's ill-equipped inspection system in connection with the improper sales of tainted rice, as well as for his own statements. Treating it as a de facto replacement, the prime minister has accepted his resignation. Since the cabinet today just accepted the resignation of Vice Minister Toshiaki Shirasu, the unusual situation exists of the top two officials of a ministry resigning at one time.

(2) Vice MAFF minister to be replaced: Prime Minister makes issue over his response to incident involving contaminated rice

NIKKEI (Page 1) (Full)
September 19, 2008

Prime Minister Fukuda, taking seriously the spread of the illegal resale of tainted rice, such as moldy rice and residual pesticide-contaminated rice, decided on September 18 to replace Vice Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) Minister Toshiaki Shirasu. The decision will be formally adopted at a cabinet meeting on the 19th. Forestry Agency Director General Michio Ide will

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succeed his post. The tainted rice incident has created an unusual situation, in which the top administrative official in the ministry will take responsibility by resigning.

Referring to the tainted rice incident, Shirasu denied MAFF's responsibility, saying, "At the present stage, I do not think that the ministry is responsible for what happened." Receiving criticism both from the ruling and opposition parties, he withdrew this comment. However, he has repeatedly insisted that he had no intention of stepping down, because it was necessary for him to find out what really happened and ready measures to prevent a recurrence.

The prime minister, who from the start of his cabinet has called for a shift to a government that attaches importance to consumers, has made the response of MAFF, including Shirasu, into an issue. In the end, he reached a decision to press the ministry to make a fresh start by replacing the vice minister.

(3) Aso negative about holding Lower House election on Oct. 26, saying, Lower House will not be dissolved until supplementary budget bill secures Diet approval

Tokyo Shimbun Online (Abridged)
13:13, September 19, 2008

Secretary General Taro Aso, who has a commanding lead in the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) presidential race, announced today his stance of giving priority to holding Diet deliberations on the fiscal 2008 supplementary budget bill in the next extraordinary Diet session. He took a negative view about the rumor circulating in the party that the Lower House might be dissolved on October 26.

During a debate hosted by the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan, Aso underscored, "The government has adopted a set of emergency economic stimulus measures. Since the word "emergency" is attached to the package, we must have it deliberated by the Diet immediately." Touching on reports by some news organizations that the LDP and the New Komeito had agreed to set the election for October 26, Aso said, "Even though Japanese dailies reported so, there is a strong possibility you made a mistake if you had sent a cable to your head office saying just as they reported." He added, "I would never speak too soon about the timing of dissolving the Lower House."

He also categorically said during a TBS talk show on the morning of the 19th: "I want to secure Diet passage of the emergency economic stimulus package by all means. Top priority should be given to the supplementary budget. Dissolving the Lower House comes after that." He continued, "Whether the other side will agree to deliberate on that is another story. We have been deceived by them many times." He hinted at the possibility of dissolving the Lower House before passage of the supplementary budget bill only in the event the DPJ adopted tactics delaying Diet deliberations.

(4) Aso certain to become next LDP president; Party's attention already shifted to personnel appointments

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Excerpts)
September 19, 2008

With Secretary General Taro Aso running way ahead of the other four
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candidates in the ongoing LDP presidential race, LDP members' attention has already shifted to who will join the next cabinet and assume the party's key posts after the Sept. 22 election. Aso has revealed a plan to give posts to even his political rivals in order to enhance party unity. Chances are high that Aso will offer cabinet posts to Economy and Fiscal Policy Minister Kaoru Yosano and former Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba. The lineup of an Aso cabinet may vary depending on who comes in second after Aso.

There is strong speculation in the Aso camp that he will replace a large part of the Fukuda cabinet in a bid to place a clear Aso imprint on his administration.

The posts of secretary general and chief cabinet secretary are now being considered. In fact, Aso has already been asked for major posts, such as secretary general and chief cabinet secretary, by former Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori, the supreme adviser of the Machimura faction, which is the largest in the LDP. Aso has secured 70 PERCENT of the Machimura faction votes. With Aso likely to give some consideration to the Machimura faction, such persons as Chief Cabinet Secretary Machimura and former Chief Cabinet Secretary Hiroyuki Hosoda are being mentioned.

Further, Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Tadamori Oshima and Election Strategy Council Vice Chairman Yoshihide Suga, who are close to Aso, are being bandied as the possible next chief cabinet secretary, the cabinet's spokesman. Some are also pointing to former Policy Research Council Chairman Shoichi Nakagawa and former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe as candidates for the foreign minister's portfolio. There is a possibility that Nakagawa, a close friend of Aso, will obtain one of the four LDP top executive posts, if not a major portfolio.

Aso is also expected to consider keeping Environment Minister Tetsuo Saito of the New Komeito, Defense Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi and others who were appointed only two months ago by Prime Minister Fukuda.

The ability to answer questions at the Diet and stability are usually critical factors in selecting cabinet ministers and party executives. Given the likelihood that the next Lower House election will take place in October, individual images can be an important criterion in making decisions this time around.

Who will come in second after Aso is also drawing much attention.

Many in the Aso camp are dismissive of giving a cabinet post to former Defense Minister Yuriko Koike, whose economic policy differs from Aso's. But some think that if Koike or former Policy Research Council Chairman Nobuteru Ishihara becomes the runner-up, Aso will offer a portfolio or an executive party post to one of them. Ishihara might become the next secretary general.

(5) LDP presidential election losing substance: Yosano cancels campaign speech due to U.S. financial crisis

With Secretary General Taro Aso (67) securing prospects for sweeping to victory in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) presidential election, the interest of Lower House members of the party have now

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completely shifted to their own elections. State Minister for Economic and Fiscal Policy Kaoru Yosano (70), one of the five presidential candidates, canceled a stumping speech scheduled to be given in Akita City and Ichinoseki City in Iwate Prefecture on September 18 in order to deal with the financial crisis originated in the U.S., including the collapse of Lehman Brothers, a leading U.S. security firm. The presidential election is showing signs of losing substance just when it has entered the final phase.

Lawmakers now eye on Lower House election

Aso said in a speech given in Ichinoseki City on the 18th: "Japan must take measures to handle the collapse of Lehman Brothers. Mr. Yosano is not here today, because he is a minister in charge of that." Four other candidates made a public appeal there on their policy of providing assistance to that area, which was hit by the Iwate-Miyagi Quake. Aso stressed his determination to challenge the Lower House, saying, "I have renewed my resolve to contend Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) President Ichiro Ozawa, whose home constituency is Iwate and who is extremely strong here."

Former Secretary General Nobuteru Ishihara (51) was also supposed to abstain from the joint campaign speech meeting. He was scheduled to go to Koriyama City, Fukushima Prefecture to make a campaign speech for an assembly member, with whom he has an association. However, he all of a sudden appeared in Ichinoseki City, saying, "I was able to leave part way."

A Lower House member, who backs former Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba (51), candidly said, "The Lower House election is more important." He accompanied Ishiba on his canvassing tour just once. This lawmaker is actively visiting his supporters in his home constituency. One party executive complained, "We should get off the presidential election. The government and the ruling parties should come up with countermeasures against the financial crisis. This way, we can better appeal to voters."

(6) Former LDP member Koichi Hamada: Five presidential candidates cannot talk about future of Japan 10 years from now

Question: Five candidates are running in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) presidential election.

Koichi Hamada: The candidacy of five LDP lawmakers gave the public a sense of community. The candidates are now debating whether the consumption tax should be raised or not. This is unprecedented. However, Land, Infrastructure and Transport Minister Sadakazu Tanigaki and Foreign Minister Masahiko Koumura, who had previously run in the presidential leadership race, did not run this time. They should have come forward again. If they had come out, debates on the tax system and foreign policy would have deepened. I wanted them to stand in the election this time around, as well.

Question: Are you satisfied with the policies of the five candidates?

Hamada: I haven't heard their visions on the future of Japan ten years from now. They should talk about policies for our country's future, not just immediate issues.

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Question: What is your impression of the five candidates?

Hamada: It is good that former Policy Research Council Chairman Nobuteru Ishihara has a pleasant way of presenting himself, and that former Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba talks about what kind of foreign policy Japan should take. It is significant that Economic and Fiscal Policy Minister Kaoru Yosano stated that he would increase the consumption tax. I don't need to praise Secretary General Aso because he is the most likely candidate to become the next president. I think he is way ahead of the other candidates as a prime ministerial candidate.

Question: You didn't mention the name of former Defense Minister Yuriko Koike.

Hamada: Since former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi is supporting her, I don't need to refer to her. I don't know her at all.

Question: Compared to the past elections, what do you think of the ongoing leadership race?

Hamada: I think the factional influence has weakened. The election campaigns give an impression of cleanliness since lawmakers are required to submit all receipts for every item costing one yen and over. But in the election campaign, I don't sense the kind of pluck and tenacity for the nation and people I had expected.

Question: What is your biggest request of the new LDP president?

Hamada: The new president must pass the supplementary budget for fiscal 2008 through the Diet. Small and medium-sized enterprises, transportation companies, and fishermen desperately want measures that would help them.

Question: The Lower House will likely be dissolved at the outset of the upcoming extraordinary Diet session.

Hamada: A person who thinks about such is not qualified to become our country's prime minister. Since the economy has slowed down, the public needs specific economic measures, including a supplementary budget. Japan also should continue its refueling mission in the Indian Ocean.

Question: Yet, the opposition camp controls the House of Councillors.

Hamada: What the LDP should do is to make efforts to increase the number of its supporters in the Upper House. Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) President Ichiro Ozawa shook hands with Peoples' New Party (PNP) leader Tamisuke Watanuki. Someone in the LDP should meet with Mr. Watanuki and get down on his hands and knees and apologize. At least such an effort should be made.

Question: Have you cast a vote in the Chiba prefectoral chapter's primary election?

Hamada: I cast a vote on Sept. 16.

Question: For whom did you vote?

Hamada: Well, I voted for a candidate who will win. Ha ha ha. That

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person has fighting spirit because the new president will have to fight with the opposition.

Question: Do you think the LDP can win the Lower House election under the leadership of Mr. Aso?

Hamada: Since many want the DPJ to take over the reins of government at least once, I can say now that the DPJ would win. For that reason, the Lower House should be dissolved after the supplementary budget is adopted and the refueling operation is extended. I think the consumption tax should have been hiked while the popular Prime Minister Koizumi was in office.

(7) Interview with Deputy DPJ President Naoto Kan: Form of country

must be changed first

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)
September 19, 2008

-- How do you view the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) presidential election?

"Following former Prime Minister Abe, Prime Minister Fukuda has now abandoned his government. The LDP should first apologize to the people that two prime ministers they chose have successively abandoned their administration. I must say strongly that what happened manifests the irresponsible predisposition innate in the LDP as a whole."

-- Some of policies advocated by presidential elections are similar to those of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto), including the reallocation of special-purpose road-construction revenues and the use of a so-called hidden slush fund.

"I don't have such an impression at all. The DPJ's policy proposals are based on the notion that the country's way of leaving matters to the bureaucracy to work out should be changed. The LDP's proposal does not include its basis. What the DPJ is trying to do is changing the current feudalistic Tokugawa-like system to Meiji Restoration-like government, so to speak. The LDP is talking like a feudal lord about paying rice as land tax. Although it is necessary to change the system from central government to decentralized government, and move from reliance on the bureaucracy to a system where everything is open to the people, the candidates for the LDP presidency are not talking about decentralization at all."

-- Do you think that depending on the results of the LDP presidential election and the general election that will follow, there is a possibility of political realignment?

"If the result of the general election brings in an administration centered on the DPJ, there is a good possibility of the LDP collapsing. It was that way in 1993."

-- Is the DPJ asserting that it as the number one opposition party be entrusted with managing the election?

"The question is what responsibility does the LDP and the New Komeito - particularly the LDP - feel. Since the LDP like before has a majority in the Lower House, the prime minister has been changed a number of times without there being an election. Is that acceptable? From the point of view of the public, the LDP does not notice that

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it is not a party of responsibility."

-- What will the DPJ be doing during the LDP presidential election?

"The party head elections of the two major parties are like the semi-finals. We are now drafting a manifesto that hears the wishes of the people and plan to use it in the general election that will be the main election."

(8) Gulf nations counting on Japan to continue refueling mission in Indian Ocean

YOMIURI (Page 11) (Full)
September 19, 2008

By Akira Mizuguchi, head of Keio University International Exchange Center

Following a tour of Dubai this January, I visited Qatar and Bahrain in August. These countries are enjoying unprecedentedly marked economic growth. During my travel, I felt that in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states undergoing significant changes, Japan might lose its political presence, focusing particularly on its involvement in projects to help urban development in those countries and in the war against terror.

Japanese companies have been slow to take part in the urban development projects because they have given priority to making profit and have little understanding of the purpose of these projects. Even so, Japanese firms are gradually becoming aware of their importance through serious analysis of the present situation. I hope many more firms will participate in the projects.

The nation's commitment to the war on terror will be affected by whether the new Antiterrorism Special Measures Law can be extended beyond its expiration on Jan. 15. The said law was previously rejected in the House of Councillors but was then reinstated by a two-thirds lower chamber overriding vote, the first time in 57 years for such a vote to be taken. The Maritime Self-Defense Force's (MSDF) refueling mission in the Indian Ocean is to support Maritime Interception Operation (MIO) incorporated in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), which is aimed at rooting out terrorism. There were allegations that MSDF-supplied fuel had been illegally diverted for the U.S. mission in Iraq. Remembering this, some Japanese people are opposed to a plan to extend the refueling mission.

Overseas, however, there are different views from such negative views in Japan. British Ambassador to Japan Warren has asked the Japanese government to continue its refueling operation. Afghan President Hamid Karzai reportedly expressed hopes for Japan's continued refueling service, given intensifying activities by the Taliban in his country.

The GCC countries, which are deeply involved in Japan's energy security, also know that Japan has been participating in the war on terror. Many of them expect Japan to continue the mission. For instance, when I was in Qatar, one-fourth of the space in a local newspaper was devoted to the news that aid worker Kazuya Ito belonging to NGO Peshawar-kai had been slain in Afghanistan. The newspaper quoted Foreign Minister Koumura as saying that there will be no change in Japan's commitment to reconstruction assistance in Afghanistan and to the war on terror.

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The GCC countries have improved their media environment, so we can obtain information on global affairs at the international level here. My acquaintance in this region emphasized the importance of international cooperation in resolving global issues. Pointing out that Japan has begun to pay more attention to domestic affairs than foreign affairs, the acquaintance expressed apprehension about a possible suspension of Japan's refueling mission.

In the region, we heard these views if Japan discontinues the refueling operation: (1) Japan should instead participate in peacekeeping operations that carry risk in Afghanistan; (2) if Japan suspends the service for the reason of domestic political problems, as was the previous case, Japan will lose credibility in the international community; and (3) Japan will come under fire as a free rider in the global effort to prevent piracy.

Japan's international evaluation will be affected by whether Japan can extend the Antiterrorism Special Measures Law. But we hear talk in Japan about this issue as if it were a domestic issue or an issue between Japan and the U.S. The substance of the issue might be misunderstood.

It is urgently necessary for us Japanese to be aware of the actual situation of the changing international community and review how Japan should be involved in the war on terror. In the nation, the political situation is in a critical state as Prime Minister Abe and his successor Fukuda stepped down after a short period of time. That is why I think it is important for Japan to appeal to the world its eagerness to continue its international cooperation.

(9) G-8 foreign ministerial may be postponed

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
September 19, 2008

The annual Group of Eight foreign ministerial is usually held in New York in late September timed with the UN General Assembly. The

possibility has become strong that such a ministerial will be put off this year, according to a senior Foreign Ministry official yesterday. At the same time, the next foreign minister under a new administration is scheduled to attend UNGA. Coordination is underway for the next foreign minister to depart for the United States on Sept. 25.

(10) Foreign, justice ministries differ on U.S. military status

OKINAWA TIMES (Page 1) (Full)
September 18, 2008

(Tokyo)

The full contents of a secret Justice Ministry document on how to handle incidents involving U.S. military personnel, civilian employees, and their families were revealed yesterday. The Okinawa Times has obtained the full text, which describes specific instructions to handle incidents, such as a notification that was issued in 1953 by the then director general of the Justice Ministry's Criminal Affairs Bureau and requested jurisdiction not be exercised, except for serious cases. In addition, the disclosed document also details a secret agreement reached between Japan and the United States that formed the basis for the notification. It realistically depicts the Japanese government's subservience to the

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United States and also shows contradictions to the government's conventional view.

The document was created by the Justice Ministry's Criminal Affairs Bureau as reference material regarding criminal jurisdiction over U.S. military personnel, et al. It is 491 pages long, with a stamp of "Secret" on its cover, giving instructions in concrete terms for specific cases.

In 1953, Japan and the United States reached an intergovernmental agreement concerning U.S. military aircraft crashes. The agreement says U.S. military authorities are allowed to enter private properties "without prior authorization."

However, the Foreign Ministry's description posted on its website says U.S. military authorities are allowed to do so "if and when there is no time to obtain prior authority." This wording in the Foreign Ministry's website-posted description differs substantively from that in the 1953 agreement. This difference from the wording of the document written in English was noted in the Diet.

The Foreign Ministry has explained that the Japan-U.S. agreement requires prior authority in principle. However, the Justice Ministry's interpretation is based on the English text's wording. The Foreign Ministry's stance will likely be called into question again.

However, in 1958, the National Police Agency also issued a notification to the chiefs of prefectural police headquarters regarding the security of aircraft crash sites, instructing them to consider how to secure evidence and prevent secrets from leaking. In 1959, the NPA instructed local police chiefs to tell the press that the U.S. military requested there be no photographing of the site of an aircraft crash. In this case, the NPA notification told local police chiefs to inform the press of that request. As seen from this notification, the NPA set forth its stance of cooperating in a positive manner with the U.S. military to secure secrets.

The secret document file containing these instructions is archived at the National Diet Library. Since June, however, the file has been embargoed to the public-except for Diet members-at the Justice Ministry's request. On Sept. 10, Kantoku Teruya, a House of Representatives member of the Social Democratic Party, perused the document at the National Diet Library. Teruya, meeting the press on Sept. 17, noted the difference between the two kinds of documentations. "The Foreign Ministry is intentionally trying to cover up the facts," he said.

SCHIEFFER